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An

Inaugural dissertation

On

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W. L. R.

Acute Rheumatism

by

Joseph F. Shaw

of

Maryland

January – A. 1827

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Acute Rheumatism.

Though not ranked among the opprobria medicorum, there are perhaps few diseases, to which the human system is liable that more frequently harrow the feelings of the compassionate Physician and cause him to experience and regret the imperfection of the healing art; than the one now under consideration. Though life be seldom in danger, yet long continued and agonizing pain, sometimes makes even death not undesirable. Unlike Gout which generally attacks the luxurious and indolent and higher classes of society, Rheumatism, as if no condition in life should be exempt from its troubles, selects for the most part the labouring class, those whose occupations subjects them to exposure to its exciting causes, and those whose own & whose family's support demands their personal exertions, inflicting on them little less than the pangs of Inquisitorial torment.— Witnessing some unhappy cases of this description induced me to investigate as far as my limited means would permit, the nature and treatment of this disease as detail-

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d by the best writers, within my reach, who have treatic on
he subject; the result of this investigation, and my own
perience, will be comprised in the following diserta-
ion, Confounded with arthritis, this disease has not been
istinctly or separately treated of, by any of the ancient
hysicians. 'tis true the word "εὐματισμοὺς" is used by Galen
ut so vaguely that we are left in doubt whether he meant
he disease at present known by that name — To Ballonius
e owe the first accurate description of it: and his treat
ent has been followed in some of its most prominent fea
tures, by the best practitioners to the present day.
Dr. Cullen has defined Rheumatism; "A disease from an ex
ernal and often an evident cause, pyrexia, pain about
he joints following the course of the muscles, fixing up
n the knees & larger joints, in preference to those of the feet
r hands, increased by external heat." Dr Sydenham has des=
ribed it as. "A peculiar species of inflammation, af
ecting the parts which have a fibrous texture, and most
requently the synovial membranes, producing much
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the inflammatory type." Dr Good in his valuable work on the Sanguineous Function defines acute rheumatism as "pain inflammation and fullness usually about the larger joints and surrounding muscles, often wandering, urine depositing a lateritious sediment, fever & cauma."

By comparing the above cited mentioned definitions and numerous others which might be collected, if the nature of the subject required, we shall find a similarity so striking as to point the disease as ~~one of~~ a specific nature, and bearing its own peculiarities so strongly impressed as to surprise us that it should so long have remained undistinguished from its kindred affections, —

Nosologists have generally divided Rheumatism into Acute & Chronic for which the terms tonic and Atonic or sub acute have been latterly proposed as more expressive, yet still as the former are more generally known & better understood, I see no necessity to change them, and shall therefore retain them in this essay —

Acute Rheumatism is ushered in with the ordinary symptoms of pyrexia, preceded or succeeded by pain in

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the large joints, most frequently the hip, knee, shoulder, elbow, rarely the fingers or toes. Though sometime attacking muscular parts, the ligaments, tendons aponeuroses and fibrous textures of the body seem to be the legitimate seat of the disease; The Fever has exacerbations in the evening the patient is restless, vegetant, and complains of increased pain at night, from the heat of the bed & covering, The urine sometimes pale in the commencement. though generally high coloured depositing after the disease has continued for sometime a lateritious sediment. the bowels are mostly costive.
The sympathetic fever is speedily established, attended with a hot dry skin, a full hard & frequent pulse; the blood drawn now has a coriaceous appearance, the tongue covered with a whitish liscid fur. and the complexion of a pallow hue, frequently an unequal perspiration breaks out - unaccompanied by any obviously beneficial effect. -
There is no disease probably in which metastasis is more frequent than in this, I have seen a case where the pain would pass almost instantaneously from the knee to the ancle. or to the knee of the opposite side, to the shoulder, hand

*The integuments not unfrequently feel the effect of metastasis

lips and various other parts of the body* - Sometimes, in the language of Dr Good, it darts internally upon organs we should little suspect as the diaphragm and the pleura, and I have occasionally known the stomach as suddenly and as severely affected as in gout; it is also said at times to pitch upon the heart & the intestinal canal, and to produce excruciating torture in both these organs; these changes are most apt to take place at night. From its proneness to Metastasis, and frequently attacking two similar parts at the same time Dr Darwin was led to consider Rheumatism as not a primary disease, but the consequence of the translation of morbid matter action from one part of the system to another. Whatever part it attacks it renders sore to the touch, inflamed, red, and swollen, and a very perceptible increase of heat in the part aptly termed by a gentleman who has experienced the utmost tortures it could inflict "The Rheumatic fire" - The muscles are often affected with spasmodic twitches I have seen the knee start of itself from the pillow it reposed on giving the patient the most excruciating pain.

Persons labouring under acute rheumatism compare the pain they

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they suffer to what they suppose would arise from an animal's gnawing the part; a burning, throbbing & pricking sensation is also experienced.— "the anxious expression of the patients countenance under a fit of Rheumatism marks the severity of the disease." The countenance is also pale & flushed alternately and the skin of the face relaxed, for the most part covered with a greasy kind of moisture.— The affected joint is more or less ~~con~~flexed and when perfectly at rest is sometimes easy. the least motion gives pain.— The disease sometimes goes off without any observable crisis, at others it disappears with a laterious deposit in the urine, or by a gentle diarrhoea, or a general diaphoresis or hemorrhage from some tubercular part. It has been remarked, and my own knowledge in one case bears testimony to the truth of it, "that when the knee or hip is the seat of Rheumatism the genital organs of that side are affected. ~~with an [illegible]~~ --

Causes

Rheumatism, is a disease of the Spring and autumn, seldom occurring in Summer & comparatively rare in winter

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if the temperature be uniformly cold; but in this climate, where the weather in winter is remarkably variable I would say the disease occurs as often or oftener than in the fall or spring. The cause is usually attributed to the vicissitudes of the weather from heat to cold or vice versa, cold applied to the body when in a warm perspiration; the long continued application of cold with moisture, as wearing wet clothes sleeping in damp sheets. standing on the cold wet ground with thin soaled shoes on; sleeping partially covered exposed to a current of air; too early change of winter clothing, especially the flannel — for the dress of summer; exposure while under the influence of Mercury; habits of effeminacy; deranged state of the digestive organs by inducing debility render the body liable to be affected; sprains, luxations, and whatever weaken the structure of the joints; a previous attack of the disease; and according to Sir C. Winlingham, as cited by Dr Good, amputation predisposes to it. That Rheumatism is frequently an hereditary disease. I believe is almost universally admitted — both sexes are equally obnoxious to it; the middle aged more than the young or old are exposed to its attacks

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ted are the chief predisponent & exciting causes of Rheumatism
the proximate cause involving that of inflammation seems
still to be a vexata quæstio among pathologists; Indeed the
proximate causes of diseases generally, have baffled the ingenuity of theorists from the earliest times and they appear now to have arrived not much nearer the truth than the poet who describing their escape from Pandora's box observes, "νοσοι δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ἐφ' ἡμερη ἠδ' ἐπι νυκτι

Αὐτομαροι φοιτωσι, κακα δ' ἀνθρωποισι φερουσαι

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gnosis, The only diseases which we can in any danger of mistaking for
Rheumatism, are Gout and some of the symptoms of secondary Syphilis for
the latter frequently bear a strong resemblance to the chronic
stage, in this case the history of the patients previous life
will afford us the surest diagnosis,
Sydenham in his valuable treatise on gout has drawn
the discriminating symptoms between it and Rheumatism
I cannot do better than quote his words, "From Rheuma
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one mark, as by the concurrence of several circumstances, In the first fit of gout; it seldom happens that more than one part is affected; and still more rarely, that more than one part is attacked at the same moment, This solitary disposition of gout as to its situation in the first attack, is a striking point of discrimination; to which may be particularly added the adult age, In ordinary examples the diagnosis is not difficult, The remissions during the day from pain and fever are much more distinct in acute gout than in acute Rheumatism: and among the local characters which are striking in gout, the following may be selected; – A serous effusion into the cellular membrane immediately supervening the invasion of a fit, into the parts usually affected by it; and which yields a pit to the finger as the inflammation ceases, and in a slight degree, even before this, when the skin is not extremely tense; A turgescent state of the neighbouring veins more marked and general than in Rheumatism, sometimes appearing in the whole limb and occasionally preceding the inflammation a day or two or even longer; the pain in Rheumatism is more severe and gnawing. the inflamed part does not present

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the shining glossy appearance as in gout. in Rheumatism there is no desquamation of the inflamed part as is sometimes the case in Gout, unlessit be produced by some particular application. But the surest diagnostic is that Gout is universally proceeds from disorder of the digestive apparatus, where as Rheumatism does not, and may usually be traced to some improper exposure to cold, or sudden changes of the weather,

We should also be acquainted with the patients mode of living and the diseases of his more immediate ancestors to assist us in making up our opinion.—

From the symptoms and phenomena of Rheumatism it may readily be perceived that it is a disease of inflammatory action modified by the tissue in which it is located, The leading indication of cure will be to reduce vascular excitement, this is most effectually done, first: by V. Section, For this in the language of Dr Chapman there is no substitute. it should be repeated again & again, if the state of the system requires and will bear it. This practice has the sanction of the best medical authority; it was principally relied on by Bal-

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lonius who as we have said before first accurately discriminated the disease, Sydenham also placed his chief reliance on it; his plan was to bleed four days successively, keep the bowels open and restrict the patient to the lowest diet. Sir John Pringle in his diseases of the army observes "that the cure was to be obtained only by repeated and almost daily bleedings till the patient was without pain," and that frequent bleedings weaken the body less perhaps than in almost any other disease, When the fever is violent observes Dr Good and especially when the frame is robust, our only remedies are V.S. and diaphoretics by the former which will often demand repetition we take off the inflammatory diathesis,
Cullen in his treatise on this disease observes that Bloodletting is our chief remedy here it should be drawn in large quantities and the bleeding frequently repeated in proportion to the frequency fullness & hardness of the pulse and to the violence of the pain, for the most part large and repeated bleedings seem to be

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to be necessary and accordingly have been very much employed but to this some bounds should be set for very profuse bleedings occasion a slow recovery and if not absolutely effectual are ready to produce a chronic rheumatism; It would be needless to cite more authority in favour of this remedy as the concurrent testimony of almost all practitioners agrees in placing it the head of the curative means. The blood when drawn at the commencement of an attack presents the same appearance as that taken from the arm of one in vigorous health but at the second bleeding it generally shews the inflammatory crust; - We should be guided here as in plethora by the appearance of the blood drawn, by the pulse and pain. Secondly by emetics, These have been highly extolled by some, they prove useful not so much by their control over the vascular system as by cleansing the stomach when loaded with offensive matter which is often the case, particularly when the disease arises in miasmatic districts and when the hepatic apparatus is deranged causing a copious secretion of bile; in these cases

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cases emetics may be resorted to with decided advantage
They are prescribed by Dr Haygarth preparatory to the em
ployment of peruvian bark in this disease, though he ob
serves that it is sometimes necessary to premise V. Section also.
I pass from the consideration of Emetics to that of purga
tives. They have not generally received the sanction of the
profession; but for my own part I should consider them
a valuable remedy. I am certain that I have seen a case
where the exhibition of an active cathartick was pro
ductive of a cessation of pain and the suspension of ~~pain~~
an attack for two or three days. In almost all the other
inflamatory diseases the efficacy of purging is undenied
They (~~is~~) (purgatives,) diminish arterial action and de
plete powerfully. in treating of the practical appli
cation of cathartics Dr Chapman observes that as
much as ~~in~~ any other diseases are the genuine phleg
masia treated by purgatives, Of the more inflammatory of this
order is acute Rheumatism and of course, these, among
other evacuants in the early stage are useful.
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out any considerable abatement, for months or even the phlogistic diathesis of the arteries is here kept up, while the strength in general is so much reduced as utterly to forbid the further loss of blood. In this state purging also occasionally proves of great advantage. It seems more than any other remedy, to quiet the mobility of the arteries, and to diffuse excitement over the system which in these cases is chiefly concentrated in the blood vessels; Every one who has had much clinical experience must have observed the intimate connexion which subsists between rheumatism and the acute affections of the ~~alimentary~~ intestinal canal, as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery— This latter disease has been maintained by some to be a rheumatic state of the bowels. They frequently alternate——— Nothing indeed is much more common than to see rheumatism, suspended, or even cured by diarrhoea spontaneously induced, the course which nature points out, I have successfully ~~imitated~~ imitated in the more obstinate and protracted cases of the disease"—

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-ency to constipation, it will be necessary to employ medicines to keep the bowels in a soluble state and procure one or two evacuations daily, for this purpose Rhubarb magnesia Sulphur, Cremor Tartar Sal de Duobus are prescribed. Sulphur from its action on the surface is considered particularly useful, - When the sympathetic power is established and the stomach and chylopoietic viscera are deranged small doses of calomel or the blue pill worked off by Rhubarb, or senna, or neutral salts according to the plan recommended by Abernethy, will be found extremely serviceable

The utility of Diaphoretics in Rheumatism is universally admitted, but to prove beneficial they should not be exhibited till vascular excitement is sufficiently reduced by previous depletion, It would, as a general rule, be best to commence with the use of the milder articles of the class. As acetate of Ammonia, Neutral Salts Sweet Spirits of Nitre &c by an attentive observance of their effects, we may conclude on the propriety of the more efficient - Dover's powders have acquired a well deserved

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reputation in this disease, but there requires some degree of caution in their use, they are never admissible whilst any considerable febrile excitement exists, and when once begun to gain their full effects, they should be, in obstinate cases kept up for twenty four hours. - The nitrous powders form also a very excellent remedy. - External means are sometimes resorted to. in order to procure diaphoresis, the warm bath and vapour bath are decidedly useful.

The Peruvian bark has been employed in this disease by many of the most eminent practitioners, such as Morton, Fothergill Sir George Fordyce, Haygarth and several others equally respectable. - They have extolled the efficacy of this article in the highest strain of panegyric. Dr Fordyce observes, that for the last fifteen years he had healed rheumatism exclusively with Peruvian bark, and that he had not lost more than two or three patients although he had healed several hundred patients in this way who laboured under the disease, during that time.

Dr Haygarth has used it with still more decided success. He commenced the treatment by giving the patient an antimonial emetic so as thoroughly to evacuate the stomach, Then

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the peruvian bark in doses of 5 .. 10 .. or 15 grains every two or three hours gradually increasing the dose to 20 .. 30 .. or 40 grs. if it seemed to prove beneficial. but never giving more than perfectly agreed with the patients stomach; he sometimes found it necessary to repeat the emetic and even bleed, before the stomach would receive the medicine, — In concluding his remarks on this mode of treatment he observes that for many years I have been thoroughly convinced the peruvian bark has a more powerful controul over Rheumatism than over any other disease and that it does not cure ~~the~~ ague so certainly and quickly. It also prevents those flying pains which often affect the patient when cured in the ordinary way.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that ~~the~~ weight of medical authority & experience is decided by against the efficacy of this method of cure; To explain the cause of this dis-cordancy of medical opinion about a matter of fact, is far beyond my power. Judging from the inflammatory nature of the disease and the stimulating & tonic properties of the medicine I should certainly conclude against the practice, — What would be the effect of the Sulphate of Quinine? from the effects of this article in bilious fevers according

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cording to the observations of Dr Holcombe recently published I am inclined to think it would prove eminently useful — Dr Chapman, thinks that the use of bark is best suited to the convalescence, To recruit strength and promote recovery — And also in those cases arising in low & marshy districts generally of a remittent or intermittent character — here, he says the system is commonly reduced and the medicine may be sooner resorted to. This seems to be the best manner of using the article, It is certainly the most reasonable practice, and is corroborated by the most numerous and best authorities —

Sir John Pringles in his diseases of the army observes that the best internal remedy he had used was camphor though not pushed so far as to excite a sweat —

Having thus briefly stated the principal general remedies I shal next proceed to the local treatment, Whilst the pains are wandering we must principally rely on constitutional remedies but when the disease has fixed on any particular part affecting it with excruciating pains accompanied with swelling tension heat &c, local applications are of essential service To relieve these symptoms topical blood letting by cups or leeches

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are usually resorted to, Friction with ointments as of Sulphur & lard, volatile linament, camphorated linament, fomentations, poultices of bread & milk, ~~&~~ hops. Cold applications are highly extolled by Dr Jackson of Boston, on the authority of the Russian Physicians but I believe their efficacy is not generally admitted; although there are undoubtedly some cases in which they do good. The lepid evaporating lotion of Scud amore composed of one part of Alcohol & three of the camphor mixture is according to that author worthy of the highest commendation as an auxiliary to general treatment. The effect of this application says he is truly surprising - treatise on acute R.

Of the efficacy of blisters in this disease I have some slight experience, and as the case in which I saw them used is in some respects peculiar, I have thought it not improper to introduce it here. P. Briscoe has been subject to attacks of Rheumatism from his youth. The disease has ~~been~~ always fastened upon his right knee, this he attributes to an injury done the joint by leaping, when a boy, from a tree, and at another time straining it severely at a game of ~~fives~~ - His first attack happened in the year 1802. during which attack he was attended by

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Dr G. Brown of Maryland who at that time was one of the most distinguished practitioners in this country, and had been physician to General Washington; but the disease yielded to no particular remedy, and as the patient expressed it wore itself out; From that time he continued pretty ~~free, free~~ well if we except a few slight attacks, till 1813, in the fall of this year he was seized with a most violent recurrence of the disease which continued throughout the succeeding winter & spring and did not finally terminate till the middle of Summer, during the whole of this attack he had the best medical attention that could be procured, and tried every remedy the skill & ingenuity of his physicians could devise, or the the sympathy of his friends suggest ~~for~~ his relief but without effect, towards the termination of his illness he was put under the influence of mercury and a copious salivation induced; An abscess formed in the integuments of the limb over the junction of the heads of the Gastrocnemius muscle, from which a considerable quantity of pus was discharged; With this the disease disappeared and did not return again till the winter of 1822, when it again ~~returned~~ occurred and having run precisely the same course terminated about the same time of the year and in

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and in suppuration, in this case two abscesses formed one where the former occurred the other over the insertion of the Sartorius & gracilis tendons on the front of the tibia; In this attack the patient was treated by his brother a very respectable practitioner and graduate of this university in the same manner as he had been in the preceding one, except that a succession of blisters was employed over the affected part and the salivation omitted. — the abscess here again proved critical and after the discharge of the matter the wound soon healed and the limb got well. He now enjoyed an exemption from the disease till the summer of the present year (1826) when from some slight exposure to cold, his system being irritable and debilitated by intense application to study and a state of great constipation thereby induced, he was again attacked most violently with all the symptoms that usually attend this disease, — I am sorry to say that V. S. was not here resorted to in consequence of a strong prejudice the patient entertained against the employment of it, owing to its having failed in the two preceding attacks, though I am inclined to believe it was not pushed sufficiently far. As a substitute, for V. S. purging was resorted to, a mercu-

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rial cathartic followed by a dose of Epsom Salts seemed to prove of eminent service, suspending the pains for a day or two on their recurrence the purgative was repeated again & again but it proved insufficient to expel the disease, the pain soon fixed into its former seat, the sympathetic fever was extablished and the patient prostrated, I shall not enter into a detail of the treatment here resorted to, be it sufficient to observe that he was attended by experienced Physicians — after general depletions had been carried to considerable extent topical applications were used such as sulphur ointment, volatile liniments poultices but without producing any good effect at all, a succession of blisters was then resorted to, the effect of these I had an opportunity of witnessing daily. they were for the most part applied over the seat of pain & inflamation, the effect of the blister at first was unpleasant exciting considerable irritation, but not much more than is commonly experienced from them, but so soon as it had drawn the inflammation gradually subsided and the pain ceased, the burning sensation and hardness were dispersed and the part became of a natural healthy feel. the remedy acting as a most copious evacuant it was surprising to observe how the pain might be driven from one

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* It has been much recommended and practised with very satisfactory results.

part of the joint to another, when seated in the muscles & tendons immediately above the knee and behind it, the application of a blister there would completely dislodge it. It would pass then down to the parts below the joint; a renewal of the application there would drive the pain around to the front of the joint to the heads of the tibialis anticus & adjoining muscles, these parts were successively the seat of pain and from which it was successively driven by the application of a blister, — The patient has become quite familiar to their employment convinced of their efficacy in alleviating pain and mitigating the violence of the disease. he resorts to them whenever his sufferings are severe as others do to opium in some other indomitable kinds of disease, — What would be the effect of a large blister being applied both above & below the affected joint?*

It may be proper to observe that the disease has again run on to suppuration but is not yet (December 19th 1826) cured. I am fully aware that this disease seldom terminates in suppuration and many authors say it never does.

Regimen & diet, The antiphlogistic regimen should be most strictly enforced, the patient should be incommoded neither by heat or cold, but carefully guarding against any sudden variation

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viation of temperature, should avoid motion as much as possible rest being requisite to the cure of all inflamatory affections particularly that of the joints — and pay regard to cleanliness; his diet should be extremely low. the light farinacea ripe sub acid fruit &c all animal food must be forbidden, Sydenham confined one of his patients to whey alone for twelve days with great advantage. — the drink should be cooling and pleasant, all spirituous liquors must be absolutely forbidden. I have now briefly stated the principal remedies used in the acute form of Rheumatism and might pass on to the consideration of the chronic and anomalous forms of it: but as they differ considerably in the symptoms & treatment. I find it necessary to remain silent about them, since a separate disquisition would swell this dissertation to an unusual size. It remains now only to say a few words of the sequelæ prophylaxis and Conduct during convalescence.

Convalescence. When the disease has given way which may be known by the subsidence of excitement, cessation of pain cleaning of the tongue accompanied sometimes with a copious lateritious sediment in the urine, gentle diarrhœa, general perspiration

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pication and an apparent anxiety in the limb affected to extend itself; we must endeavour to restore tone to the system by the administration of Peruvian bark or other tonics, together with the mineral acids, - of which the sulphuric has with many the greatest share of confidence, with the use of these general remedies the limb may or rather should be frequently rubbed, and frequent exercise enjoined. Dr Sundamore observes that "The stiffness, aching and debility of the limbs which follow the acute state of pain and inflamation yield only to active exercise and friction. I have often directed the patient, when convalescent, to overcome his seeming inability by strenuous exertions, and to walk several miles in the day, beginning of course with moderate attempts. The best results have followed; and when the season of the year or the weather allows this remedial method it cannot be too strictly enjoined, so that particular cons'a indications do not forbid its practice"

Sequelæ, Chronic Rheumatism occasionally follows the acute and sometimes the affected joint and limb are rendered quite useless, the whole articular apparatus being irretrievably destroyed. The disease sometimes produces an effusion of a trans-

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parent gelatinous fluid in the sheaths of the tendons and bursa mucosa, causing considerable distention pain and uneasiness on motion the swelling sometimes appears slightly inflamed, the best application here would be a knee piece, - or if I may use the expression a laced jacket for the knee, made to extend for some distance both above and below the joint - and to fit it accurately and thus support a firm and equable pressure, the fluid will be taken up by the absorbents;

To guard against the recurrence of this disease. the patient should make use of all such means as are calculated to restore vigour to the constitution and tone to the affected parts and thereby rendering himself less liable to the injurious impressions of its exciting cause.

For this purpose he should make use of the cold bath or in place of it; immersion of the feet & legs into cold water or sponging them with the same, early every morning, he should likewise wash his hands, face, head, & neck, in cold instead of warm water. daily. Active exercise in the open air but not pushed to fatigue, is of great service, a strict attention must be had to clothing, particularly flannel next the skin

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the skin, this should be worn for most months of the year, and indeed in some cases of delicate persons, the year round; he should also keep his bowels regular & feet dry - it is almost superfluous to observe that during cold wet, disagreeable rainy weather he should be particularly careful not to expose himself - An entire change of occupation & habits of life or a removal to a more friendly climate has frequently been productive of an entire removal of the Rheumatic predisposition, and, when practicable, should be advised -